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ALLEGIANCES

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VALLEYCLAN

LEADER **Emberstar**—red she-cat with green eyes
DEPUTY **Groundstripe**—brown tabby with dark brown stripes
Apprentice, **Stonepaw**
MEDICINE CAT **Whitetail**—slender white she-cat with pale green eyes
Apprentice, **Sunnypaw**
WARRIORS **Beachface**—cream tabby tom with green eyes
Apprentice, **Fallenpaw**
Blueheart—pale she-cat with brown points and blue eyes
Apprentice, **Risingpaw**
Darkpelt—pale tom with dark points
Snowstorm—sleek tom with white silky fur
Apprentice, **Stormpaw**
Lilyfur—pale cream she-cat with green eyes
Apprentice, **Smallpaw**
Rainfur—tall calico tom
Apprentice, **Darkpaw**
Riverfur—beautiful gray she-cat with white tabby patterns
APPRENTICES **Stonepaw**—stone-gray tom with yellow eyes
Sunnypaw—golden-orange she-cat with gray flecks
Fallenpaw—light gray, white, and tortoiseshell she-cat
Risingpaw—black she-cat with blue eyes that resemble the ocean
Stormpaw—light gray tabby with white stripes
Smallpaw—mostly white she-cat with gray points
Darkpaw—cream she-cat with black stripes and blue eyes
ELDERS **Lakeclaw**—blue-gray tom with blue eyes
Sunleaf—scarred ginger tabby she-cat
Dustfoot—recently retired dusty gray tom
Maywind—old red she-cat
QUEENS **Cloudpelt**—fluffy white she-cat with green eyes

Spottedface—sleek white tabby she-cat with light gray spots on her face
Bluenight—black she-cat with blue eyes

CAVECLAN

LEADER **Amethyststar**—gray tom with darker points and lilac eyes
DEPUTY **Whitewhisker**—mostly white tom with black paws and tail with blue eyes
MEDICINE CAT **Suneye**—black she-cat with amber eyes
WARRIORS **Desertfoot**—cream she-cat
Apprentice, **Orangepaw**
Graytail—gray tom with a darker gray tail
Leopardclaw—large cat with an unusual spotted pelt
Lightfur—pale she-cat with light blue eyes
Apprentice, **Featherpaw**
APPRENTICES **Orangepaw**—scrawny orange tabby tom
Featherpaw—white fluffy she-cat with brown points

SAVANNACLAN

LEADER **Sandstar**—young pale ginger tom
DEPUTY **Dustjaw**—broad brown tabby
MEDICINE CAT **Skydrift**—pale blue-gray she-cat
WARRIORS **Burningpelt**—tough ginger tom, the oldest SavannaClan warrior

CATS OUTSIDE OF CLANS

Silver—pale gray tom with light gray points who roams the valleys
Scar—bicolored tom with black and white fur and amber eyes
Cleo—round-headed she-cat with large eyes and wiry fur
Cinnamon—brown she-cat with odd eyes who lives in a house

VALLEYCLAN

CAVECLAN

SAVANNACLAN

Prologue

The large warrior crept closer and closer to her. Its green eyes pierced her as it kept approaching paw by paw.

This is bad! the opposing she-cat thought with panic. She looked around the battle between the two Clans. Her attention shot back to the CaveClan warrior as it let out a cry of rage. It pounced on her, the two cats rolling across the sand as the rushing river's water splashed all over them.

"Blueheart!" a ValleyClan warrior yowled. Blueheart kicked the CaveClan warrior with her hind legs and rolled away. A pale tom with dark points ran to her aid.

"Blueheart! Lilyfur's down!" he panicked.

"Calm down, Darkpelt, I already have enough on my paws, I'm sure she's—" Blueheart couldn't finish. The CaveClan warrior launched itself at her, knocking the air out of her lungs. For a moment she felt nothing at all, until all the singeing pain came rushing through her veins. The blue-eyed she-cat hissed as she regained her balance.

Feeling a new sense of anger and determination, she tackled the larger warrior and grabbed it by the scruff. Blueheart threw it across the beach, only for the CaveClan warrior to hit the hard ground and roll into the rushing river. The warrior's strange patterned head sank underneath the water silently. Blueheart let out a breath she didn't know she was holding. She had accidentally killed a warrior in the midst of a border battle.

This is no time to feel guilt! the ValleyClan warrior thought. Blueheart sharply turned around.

Blood spilled across the battlefield. Cats yowled and claws were everywhere in the air. *Great StarClan! How did this all happen from just a border fight?!*

Blueheart whipped her head around towards Darkpelt, the dark-pointed tom warrior fighting off a scrawny tabby cat. The orange CaveClan apprentice pounced on Darkpelt's back, his teeth sinking into Darkpelt's fur. He yowled in pain, thrashing his body around wildly trying to throw off the apprentice.

"Darkpelt!" Blueheart mewed. She ran toward him, helping him throw off the young tom.

"Orangepaw, I've got your back!" a cream she-cat yowled. She quickly murmured something to the apprentice then swiped Blueheart's face. Blueheart whipped around and tackled her enemy. The CaveClan warrior fell over on her back and Blueheart raked her claws constantly at the exposed belly. Blood started to seep through the cream fur. The orange apprentice that had been watching ran off. Darkpelt attempted to chase after him, but Blueheart held him back.

The cream warrior, which Blueheart guessed was Orangepaw's mentor, snapped her jaws at Blueheart's neck. She threw her off and hissed, her tail lashing. Darkpelt tackled her to the ground, when suddenly, a voice yowled, "Get away from Desertfoot!"

A gray CaveClan warrior with a dark gray tail hissed. He headbutted into Darkpelt, knocking him over. The cream warrior—which Blueheart guessed was Desertfoot—got up and blinked the CaveClan warrior a look of gratitude.

Blueheart immediately recognized the gray tom. From the last gathering, the gray tabby had been spreading rumors around at the gathering that ValleyClan had been attacked by foxes and lost tons of kits because their warriors were too weak to defend against them—which was not true as all five of their kits were perfectly intact and fine. He had wanted to make ValleyClan look weak.

The dark gray-tailed warrior jumped on Blueheart, trapping her underneath his weight.

"The River is CaveClan hunting territory, Blueheart!" the gray warrior spat at her.

"No—it isn't!" Blueheart snapped as she kicked her hind legs against the warrior's belly. He jumped back hissing at her while Blueheart got back on her paws. "CaveClan will never step another paw back into ValleyClan territory again—you hear me?!" she cried. "Leave now, Graytail."

Graytail hissed and swiped a claw at Blueheart's face. She yelped and fell back, her eyes stinging as she struggled to get back up. She opened her eyes, yowling with anger and crashed into Graytail's pelt. She clawed him and sank her teeth into his pelt until he bled all across his fur. Blueheart realized that Graytail had not come alone against her as more CaveClan warriors flooded in the area towards her.

Mouse dung! That Orangepaw must've fetched for help, Blueheart realized.

Cats ran across the sand, trapping Blueheart and Darkpelt. The two ValleyClan warriors came back to back with each other as the CaveClan warriors slowly crept toward them. Blueheart held her breath as she prepared to attack, but a dark brown tabby came dashing across the field.

"Groundstripe!" Blueheart exclaimed in relief, staring at the deputy. He yowled fiercely and attacked the CaveClan warriors around them. Blueheart dropped to a battle position and attacked Desertfoot. Darkpelt took on both Orangepaw and Graytail, hissing as his tail thrashed. Graytail took him down, pinning him to the ground as Orangepaw scractched across his face. Darkpelt yelped in pain. Blueheart started forward to help him, but Desertfoot grabbed her by the scruff.

"We still have a fight to finish, ValleyClan warrior!" the cream warrior spat. She clawed Blueheart's pelt. Blueheart kicked her, running toward Darkpelt. Another CaveClan warrior pinned her down, tackling her with all its strength. Blueheart was overwhelmed by its weight.

I can't—No... Blueheart squirmed around underneath the warrior's weight. Suddenly, the weight was lifted off and Blueheart started panting for air. She got up, realizing her savior was the

deputy. Groundstripe turned to Blueheart after fighting off the warrior who had pinned her down.

"Blueheart! We need to retreat, I need you to find Lilyfur and Russetheart and help them while I take care of this," Groundstripe commanded. Blueheart turned toward Darkpelt as both Orangepaw and Graytail clawed his face.

"I can't leave Darkpelt!" Blueheart protested. "We *have* to help him. He's my broth—"

Groundstripe raised his tail."I'm afraid you can't," the deputy said softly. "It's too dangerous, we can't afford to lose any more warriors, not after what happened to Lionmane." Blueheart's blue eyes widened in horror, remembering the great warrior's limp body. They had been patrolling the Island Bridge border, but the warrior had died in a great battle against SavannaClan.

"Go!" Groundstripe hissed. Blueheart reluctantly obeyed him and took off from the battlefield.

She sprinted across the sandy beach, her paws making a pit-patter-pit-pat sound. She swiftly skidded to a stop, the sand sinking between her claws. She saw a pale cream she-cat breathing heavily, her legs splayed across the beach. Blueheart walked toward her, looking at the badly wounded she-cat.

Lilyfur, Blueheart thought sympathetically. She licked the pale warrior's fur, cleaning her wounds. *I have to get her out of here.* Blueheart grabbed Lilyfur by the scruff, trying to carry her. She was no bigger than Lilyfur, so it was hard to manage around. The pale cream she-cat slowly opened her green eyes.

"Blueheart...?" she mewed.

"Come on. Can you walk?" Blueheart softly asked. Lilyfur struggled to maintain her balance, but stood on her four paws, nodding. "Let's go."

As the two she-cats ran away from the beach and returned to the grass, Lilyfur asked her about the battle. Blueheart told her she was

given orders by the deputy, Groundstripe, to retreat. Lilyfur nodded, hoping the others would be okay. Blueheart thought back to what Groundstripe had said, *"...we can't afford to lose any more warriors, not after what happened to Lionmane."*

If only I were quicker. If only I could stop that enemy warrior, Blueheart thought.

Lionmane was a noble warrior. He was Blueheart's mentor at the time when she was Bluepaw. She could *never* forgive that SavannaClan warrior, Burningpelt.

It was all his fault. All of it! she thought harshly.

Whitetail was in the medicine den, tending to Darkpelt's wounds. He was the most injured of all of the cats in the battle. A torn ear, clawed eyes, and many other injuries. *"Will he ever be able to see again?"* were the words Blueheart had asked. Whitetail was unsure at the time, telling her it would take time for recovery. But now she was sure. She knew exactly what would happen. Darkpelt would be blind.

There was no way she could prevent it. She tried every possible herb she knew and nothing worked. The infection was too severe, and she wasn't able to save Darkpelt's vision in time.

As she searched for herbs, she heard a low groan. Whitetail turned around to see Darkpelt slowly getting up.

"Wha—what happened?" he mewed. Whitetail slowly came up to him.

"You were badly injured," she spoke in a soft voice. Darkpelt's eyes were bandaged with cobwebs. Darkpelt sat there quietly.

"Why can't I see?"

Whitetail knew she would have to break the news soon. She didn't expect him to ask as soon as he woke up though.

"CaveClan warriors injured your eyes heavily," Whitetail began.

She paused for a moment, as silence passed through the den. "I'm sorry, Darkpelt, but... you're blind." A couple of long, silent moments passed before Darkpelt had spoken again.

"No... that can't be..." His voice drowned out. He lifted a paw toward the bandages, but Whitetail put his paw back down.

"I'm sorry, Darkpelt. There's nothing more I can do for you. I don't know if you can ever continue being a warrior," Whitetail murmured. Darkpelt lowered his head.

"But—how can I help the Clan if I'm blind? I'm just another useless mouth to feed," he growled.

"Don't say that," Whitetail meowed. Darkpelt stayed silent for the next couple of moments before he spoke again.

"How's Stormpaw?" he asked, changing the subject. Whitetail faintly smiled. Darkpelt was Stormpaw's father, but rarely got to see him because of his warrior duties.

"He's well and healthy. It's going to be his first time out hunting next week," Whitetail spoke softly. A small smile grew on Darkpelt's face. Stormpaw was recently made an apprentice at most a quarter-moon ago.

"And Riverfur?" he asked.

"Yes, she's very healthy and is a thriving warrior," Whitetail told him. "I'm sure your family is going to be well," she reassured him.

Darkpelt smiled. Slowly, his smile vanished. "What about Blueheart?" The injured she-cat wasn't as heavily injured as her brother. Although she had an injured paw, it would quickly heal in a matter of time.

"She's just fine. Every warrior from the battle has seen to me." Darkpelt nodded. *Except for one,* Whitetail silently told herself. "Before you can leave the medicine den, you'll need your wounds healed," she sternly told him.

"Whatever you say, Whitetail." Darkpelt nodded, knowing better than to argue with a medicine cat. Whitetail walked back to

continue mixing herbs.

Then, she thought quietly to herself, *Oh, StarClan. Thank you so much for keeping ValleyClan well. It's a miracle that so many cats are still alive despite what we've faced in the past moons.*

The medicine cat started organizing some recently picked dock leaves and yarrow. She paused, frowning. *CaveClan is becoming more of a threat as time goes by.*

The white she-cat finished organizing her herbs. She took out some poppy seed to give to Darkpelt. Whitetail looked out the small opening in the den gazing upon Silverpelt, each StarClan warrior shining in the dark night.

She smiled. *We haven't spoken to each other for so long... When the next claw-moon comes, I'll have to meet with the other medicine cats at the Mistgem.*

As the medicine cat returned to her work, shaking the seeds out of a poppy, suddenly, everything around her seemed to fade away, blurring. The medicine den soon transformed into a foggy, sandy field. Cats were yowling in the background and claws were flying everywhere. Whitetail froze as she watched the cats attack each other. She whipped around, and saw her warrior ancestors becoming visible, standing in front of her.

It was StarClan. As much as she was happy to see them, she was confused by the battling cats.

"Lionmane—and Frostclaw!" Whitetail meowed as she saw the two warriors. Lionmane's pelt shined like a bright morning sun dipped in gold. His beautiful, lush, rainforest green eyes and his sense of authority glowed. His starry pelt shined before her. Frostclaw's pelt was a beautiful silver-blue, stars scattered in her coat. Her frost blue eyes would make a cat shiver, from how icy it looked.

"What is happening? Does StarClan have a message for me?" Whitetail asked, keeping her voice steady. Frostclaw exchanged glances with Lionmane.

"Broken peace between all three," she quietly meowed, her voice clear, but sounded as if it were shared by all the cats around her. Whitetail looked at her in confusion. What did they mean? Whitetail anxiously looked around. The battling cats' scents were hard to make out and the area was too foggy to locate where the battle was at.

A black-and-white StarClan cat walked up to Whitetail to touch noses with her. "One you should fear." He paused, his pelt glimmering. All of the cats of StarClan looked up at each other, their starry pelts shining. The sandy landscape suddenly disappeared, leaving Whitetail in an open valley, the wind ruffling her fur. It was very sudden, the tension of the battlefield was now replaced by a calm breeze. She looked back at her warrior ancestors who were all sitting around her.

All in one voice, formed together, they stated, "Beware the burning one, else all will fall."

Chapter 1

[image]

"Focus! Stop slacking off! Swipe! Keep moving! Show me your hunting crouch! Rabbit! Bird! Tackle! Don't hold back!" were the words the calico tom yowled. The young she-cat struggled to keep up with his orders. She was always one move behind as her mentor kept rambling on like the speed of a falcon. The she-cat missed a pawstep and went tumbling right onto her face.

The calico tom approached her, helping her up. "That's enough for today, Darkpaw. You've done well." The young apprentice's blue eyes shone with pride. She began washing her ruffled fur, drawing her tongue across her pelt as the calico tom slowly passed her.

Caught off guard, her mentor took off running into the distance. Darkpaw quickly followed behind as soon as she realized what he was doing. "Rainfur, wait up!" she mewed as she was left behind. She quickened her pace, moving faster and faster to keep up. They passed the trees, streams, and hills of the valleys.

A larger valley started coming into view. The calico tomcat was waiting for her at the edge of a trail that sloped down into the valley. Darkpaw reached her mentor as she crouched, regaining her breath. Rainfur turned to face Darkpaw. "You're getting faster every day. Well done, Darkpaw!" he meowed.

Darkpaw smiled happily. They would usually go far from camp for training, and when they were done, Rainfur would run all the way back to camp with Darkpaw following him. It was like a mini assessment of some kind, to quicken her pace every day. ValleyClan warriors had to run fast to catch rabbits before they could hide in their nests and pounce on birds before they could fly away in alarm. She kept arriving earlier and earlier each day. Maybe one day, she could outrun her mentor. Clearly, she was nowhere near that level now. Darkpaw swung around behind Rainfur and walked down the slope. She had completed today's training once again. She couldn't wait to start actual *hunting.*

Darkpaw was made an apprentice less than a quarter-moon ago. She had made her apprentice journey to Driftedlight to receive StarClan's blessing. Driftedlight was a mountainous area far from the Clans' territories. One of the warrior Clans, SavannaClan, would allow cats from other Clans to pass through their territory in order to journey to Driftedlight.

I can't wait to hear what Stormpaw has done for training! Darkpaw thought. *I wonder if he's gone hunting yet!*

Darkpaw passed her busy Clanmates as they shared tongues. Once she arrived at the vine covered opening through the valley wall, she walked inside the apprentices' den.

"Hiya, Darkpaw!" a light gray tom exclaimed. He had metallic ocean eyes and swirls of white on his fur. Darkpaw went over to touch noses with him, the two apprentices smiling.

"Hi, Stormpaw! How are you doing? Started hunting training yet?" Darkpaw asked. Stormpaw was Darkpaw's best friend, ever since the two were kits. They had both been apprenticed together at the same time as well with Smallpaw, another apprentice. Both of the apprentices had accompanied her and Rainfur along with their mentors to the journey to Driftedlight.

"I'm doing great! We explored ValleyClan's territory like The Ravine and the Deep Crevice," Stormpaw happily mewed. "And guess what?" Darkpaw's ears perked up.

"What?" she asked, her tail raised with excitement.

"My mentor and Rainfur are going to take us both out for a hunting patrol next week!" Stormpaw exclaimed.

Darkpaw couldn't help a purr. "Hunting? Next week?!" she exclaimed, her blue eyes gleaming. Stormpaw nodded right before a mostly white she-cat with gray points walked into the den.

"Oh. Hey, Smallpaw!" Stormpaw exclaimed cheerily, greeting the apprentice as she settled down onto a moss nest. She looked at them, examining their cheery expression, then glanced away

sharply. Stormpaw hadn't seen her sudden change in mood, but Darkpaw did.

"What's the matter?" Darkpaw murmured, her voice softening as she padded to Smallpaw. Smallpaw wasn't the type of apprentice to open up to others easily. She was mostly quiet, even during her apprentice ceremony. But Darkpaw knew she was more enthusiastic than this. Smallpaw looked up back at her, sighing.

"Remember the battle between ValleyClan and CaveClan?" Darkpaw's tail drooped. She had heard about the battle from her mentor when out training, but didn't know if it was bad or not. Stormpaw had no clue of what they were talking about while Smallpaw caught his gaze.

"While out on a border patrol near the River, CaveClan had found them and fought," she murmured. Stormpaw sat up, listening intently as Darkpaw listened with perked ears and worried eyes. "I don't know the exact details, but I do know the cats that were out on that patrol were Blueheart, Lilyfur—" Smallpaw paused, trembling. Lilyfur was Smallpaw's mentor and Smallpaw hadn't gone out training today either.

I wonder if that's because something happened to her mentor or if they just have different training schedules, Darkpaw wondered. *I hope Lilyfur is okay.* But really, she was more worried about her friend, Smallpaw. Darkpaw pressed her muzzle sympathetically against the apprentice's side. She pulled away as Smallpaw stopped trembling and began to continue.

"A-anyways," Smallpaw mewed, "Blueheart, Lilyfur, Groundstripe, Russetheart and..." Smallpaw's eyes flashed toward Stormpaw, "Darkpelt." Stormpaw's eyes widened in shock.

"Did anything happen to him?" Stormpaw immediately asked Smallpaw. Darkpaw went over to him to comfort him. Darkpelt was Stormpaw's father, but rarely got to see him due to all his warrior duties.

"Well—" Smallpaw began. Suddenly, a familiar yowl was sounding outside the den.

"Let all cats old enough to catch the prey in the valleys, gather beneath the High Hill for a Clan meeting!" Darkpaw and her companions trotted outside the apprentices' den toward the High Hill. Up there who stood on the High Hill was a red she-cat, Emberstar.

More cats flooded outside of their dens or stopped in the middle of sharing tongues to gather around their leader. Darkpaw settled somewhat near the High Hill as her den mates sat next to her. They all gazed up.

"I'm sure you all know, there was a battle between ValleyClan and CaveClan over the River. Many were injured from both Clans and I'm upset to say..." —Emberstar swallowed hard before continuing— "I'm upset to say that some were killed from the battle from both sides."

"*What?!* Over a *border fight?!*" Yowls of rage and confusion rose from the crowd. Emberstar raised her tail, as the murmurs gradually faded away.

"Yes, over a border patrol. Groundstripe led our warriors fiercely throughout the battle, but some were lost," Emberstar said. "Darkpelt—"

"No," Stormpaw murmured. Darkpaw shuffled closer to him to comfort him.

"—was heavily injured in the battle. He has been blinded," Emberstar finished. "Whitetail has confirmed she can't do anything else for him. She's tried every herb in the valleys, but nothing can work. He can no longer be a warrior and must retire with the elders." Emberstar dipped her head in honor for all he had done as a warrior.

"No longer—?" Stormpaw practically choked on his own words, "—a warrior?" Darkpaw leaned into his fur, trying to comfort him as much as she could. It seemed Stormpaw was losing his hopes and dreams. He always looked up to his father, admiring his warrior abilities. But if there isn't someone for him to look up to, his world might crash and fall. At least, that's what Darkpaw saw.

"Lilyfur has been heavily injured, but Whitetail says she'll make it. She'll be physically scarred though," Emberstar informed her Clanmates. Smallpaw smiled, glad to know that her mentor would live. "Groundstripe and Blueheart fought bravely during the battle." Two older apprentices, a black-furred one and a gray-furred one, near Darkpaw smiled proudly.

"Wait, wasn't Russetheart in the battle?" someone from the crowd asked. Yowls of agreement rose.

Emberstar, once again, raised her tail to silence them. "Russetheart... was lost in the battle." Mews of sorrow and distress rose from the Clan. Emberstar had her head down for a few heartbeats until she continued. "Russetheart was the mentor of Fallenpaw. We will sit in vigil with Russetheart and share tongues one last time with him before he truly hunts with StarClan," Emberstar mewed. "Groundstripe and I will figure things out with Fallenpaw. The Clan is dismissed."

Emberstar jumped off the High Hill, her head dipped and headed inside her den with Groundstripe, the deputy. The elders began to carry Russetheart's body and gently set him down next to the Sacred Honey Oak. Cats who were closest to Russetheart got up and went to share tongues with his body under the tree. Darkpaw got up with her friends. "I'm going to the elders' den to see my father," Stormpaw told them, walking away. Darkpaw nodded, understanding how important it was for him to see him.

Smallpaw got up. "I'm going to share tongues with Russetheart now. He was Lilyfur's best friend," Smallpaw added, "and a great warrior."

"I'll come," Darkpaw replied even though she barely knew the warrior. The two apprentices walked over to the Sacred Honey Oak. A bee nest hung above the russet-colored cat's body as cats around them crouched beside it.

It was all exciting knowing that we were hunting next week, but now this... I've never lost someone before, Darkpaw thought. *How could CaveClan do such a thing?*

"May StarClan light your path," she murmured. Once she was done

saying farewells to Russetheart, she padded to the apprentices' den, no longer feeling the excitement and energy she had felt earlier. Darkpaw settled on a tangled moss bed, lying down.

She stared up at the ceiling, her body tense. She closed her eyes and fell into darkness for what felt like moons. The sound of pawsteps awoke Darkpaw. She sat up, watching a light gray she-cat with a white belly walk into the den. Darkpaw sat up, her eyes following the apprentice. She was much older than her and looked like she could be a very young warrior.

"Are you Fallenpaw?" Darkpaw asked. The she-cat paused and then turned to look at Darkpaw.

"Yes, why?" she asked.

"Just curious," Darkpaw muttered. She made herself comfortable on the moss. "So, how do you feel?" Fallenpaw tilted her head to the side in confusion. "About your mentor I mean."

"Russetheart was an amazing warrior to look up to," Fallenpaw said softly. "He taught me how to hunt and fight."

"This isn't the first time, is it?" a new voice spoke up. Darkpaw turned to the dark corner of the den. A tom slowly moved out of the shadows, revealing a gray face and yellow eyes. He was older than Darkpaw, but younger than Fallenpaw.

"The first time?" Darkpaw asked in confusion. What did he mean?

"I don't believe we have met," said the tom, looking at Darkpaw. "I'm Stonepaw."

"Oh! You're Groundstripe's apprentice, aren't you?" Darkpaw asked.

"Huh, yeah," he muttered. "I guess some know me as that. Fallenpaw?"

The older she-cat was shuffling to the back of the den while they were talking. Her ears perked up when her name was called. She stepped back from the corner, and turned to gaze at the two.

"Yes?" she responded.

"You're still listening, right?" Stonepaw asked.

"I am," she said.

"Anyways, uh—" Stonepaw paused as he stared at Darkpaw.

Oh, he doesn't know my name, she realized. "Darkpaw," the younger apprentice said.

"Right, Darkpaw. Anyways, this hasn't been the first time Fallenpaw had to change mentors," Stonepaw explained. Darkpaw listened intently. "Her original mentor was her mother, Frostclaw."

Her mother? What happened to her? Darkpaw wondered.

"You're okay with me mentioning this, right?" Stonepaw asked. Fallenpaw nodded. "It was said that a cat pushed her over into The Ravine." Darkpaw shivered. Fallenpaw tensed.

"I heard that The Ravine is a dangerous tear in the earth with a waterfall rushing down into it," Darkpaw said. The two older apprentices nodded. "Like the saying goes, 'No cat who falls into The Ravine, ever comes back.'"

"You are right, Darkpaw. That is how the saying goes. No one dares to believe it was our own Clanmate who pushed her into The Ravine, but if it were some cat from another clan, how would they have gotten into ValleyClan territory in the first place?" Stonepaw said. "It's a pretty straightforward theory. How else would an enemy get into the territory?"

"But on that very day no one was guarding the Island Bridge. There weren't patrols there, only by the River. It *has* to be someone from SavannaClan," Fallenpaw retorted.

"Think what you like, Fallenpaw, but I think my theory is more valid than yours," Stonepaw said.

"But why would anyone do that? To their own Clanmate?!" Darkpaw demanded.

"Who knows? Not everyone can be trustworthy," Stonepaw said. "Even your own—"

"Quiet," Fallenpaw ordered. Stonepaw shut his mouth in silence.

"So then you were mentored by Russetheart?" Darkpaw asked.

"Not exactly, but you're close," Stonepaw continued. "After that, she was mentored by her father, Lionmane. He had recently finished training Blueheart and wanted to take on another apprentice. He got to train his own daughter, Fallenpaw." Darkpaw nodded in acknowledgement. "But on the very first quarter-moon of training, Lionmane was killed by a SavannaClan warrior during a border patrol. There was a fight over the Island Bridge but unfortunately, Lionmane had died."

"*Both* of your parents... passed away?" Darkpaw asked Fallenpaw in disbelief. The older apprentice shuffled into the dark. "I'm sorry. Are you all right?"

"Don't feel sorry. It's nothing to worry about. Except for him." Fallenpaw's eyes darted toward Stonepaw.

"Hey! Don't take the blame out on me. I asked if you were alright with this conversation and you agreed," Stonepaw protested. Fallenpaw's whiskers twitched. "Argh, fine. But this apprentice wants to know why you had multiple mentors."

"Because you brought it up first," Fallenpaw pointed out. Now that she mentioned it, Fallenpaw was right. Darkpaw agreed with her point.

"Ah—uh—hmph," Stonepaw said, failing to come up with a comeback and turning away. Darkpaw's tail twitched. She wanted to know the rest of the story but just assumed that after Lionmane, Fallenpaw was mentored by Russetheart.

After a moment of silence with the apprentices making "hmph" sounds, a light gray tom began to wake up and rose to his paws. Stormpaw yawned, looking around and trotted over to settle at a moss bed next to Darkpaw.

"How was the talk with Darkpelt?" Darkpaw asked.

"It was fine, just a casual conversation," Stormpaw said. "Darkpelt's still hesitant about not being a warrior anymore though. He keeps saying 'but I can still hunt and fight!' Is that true though?"

"I doubt it. But it's good that he still has some strong fighting spirit in him," Darkpaw meowed. Stormpaw nodded smiling.

"Riverfur was there too. She wanted to check up on him. And I assumed she would be there anyways," Stormpaw added. Riverfur was Stormpaw's mother. "She kept asking if Whitetail used the right herbs. She kept going, 'but she did use celandine for you, right?' and 'but did she use some beech leaves to wrap around your wounds?' I didn't know she knew so much about herbs!"

"She might as well be a second medicine cat," Darkpaw joked. Stormpaw grinned.

"Perhaps I should tell her that," he murmured.

"J-just don't tell her I gave the idea!" Darkpaw exclaimed, batting Stormpaw's ear with her paw even though he hadn't done anything. The light gray apprentice jumped back with a start and the two calmed themselves down.

"Has Smallpaw come back yet?" Stormpaw asked, looking around the den.

"No, not yet. Speaking of which, when is she going to come back?" Darkpaw asked. As if on queue, the young white she-cat walked into the den, quickly making herself comfortable on the moss bed.

"Oh! Hey, Smallpaw! We were just talking about you," Stormpaw greeted the she-cat.

"You were talking about me?" she asked softly.

"We were just wondering if you came back yet," Darkpaw clarified, glancing at Stormpaw.

"Oh." Smallpaw nodded, tucking her paws underneath her. The

young she-cat burrowed her face into her fur and curled up in a resting position. Darkpaw returned her focus to Stormpaw, looking straight into his metallic ocean eyes.

"Why are you staring at me as if I've eaten your fresh-kill?" Stormpaw defended himself as if he had just been accused of something.

"Sorry. Just... something I've been thinking about," Darkpaw explained. Stormpaw nodded cautiously. He went over to her and smacked her. His light gray paw flew across Darkpaw's face leaving a stinging mark. She managed to keep herself from falling over from the sudden impact.

"What in Silverpelt was that for?!" she hissed, standing up as her tail lashed. Stormpaw snorted and muffled a laugh, then exited the den, running. "Stormpaw!" Darkpaw started after him, but then wondered if it was worth the time.

Darkpaw must've given up on choosing to stay in the comfort of the den because she soon found herself in the camp running across grass, chasing a light gray tom in front of her.

"Stormpaw, get back over here!" Darkpaw yowled angrily. The cream tabby she-cat leaped towards the tom with her black paws outstretched and managed to pin him onto the ground. Stormpaw skidded to a stop and dropped onto the ground as she struggled to stay on top of him. Stormpaw shook her off and was panting. He got up and sat down to quickly wash himself as he glanced at Darkpaw. Darkpaw sat down next to him, still quite angry.

"Hehe...heh..." Stormpaw laughed between gasps. "Wooh! That was quite a chase you put up there."

"And I'll do it again if necessary," Darkpaw stated bitterly. She tucked in her paws underneath her. Darkpaw's whiskers twitched. "Why'd you have to hit me in the first place?"

"You were being all grumpy and sad even though you should be happy today!" Stormpaw cheerfully answered.

"I should be happy?" Darkpaw questioned with suspicion.

"Yeah! Happy!" Stormpaw mewed happily. Darkpaw sat there, thinking for a moment, her tail curled up around her paws.

As she thought, she thought about all the things that had happened today. *Everything that happened...* Darkpaw began listing down the things that seemed important today. The battle at the River, the loss of Darkpelt's sight and Russetheart's life. The fact that Fallenpaw lost both of her parents—okay... that wasn't really a "today" thing. But the rest were.

"How can you just think 'yay, happy!' even after everything that's happened today?" Darkpaw asked in confusion.

"Because we *should* be happy. Be positive. Pull through the sorrow the Clan is feeling. Plus, we're hunting next week!" Stormpaw told her enthusiastically.

"Hmm." Darkpaw stared at the grass and kept unsheathing and sheathing her claws over and over. She sheathed her claws and stopped, looking into Stormpaw's eyes. "You're right," she began. "And we *are* going hunting next week!"

Suddenly, there was a loud yowling coming from the High Hill. Both the apprentices turned their heads in sync as a red she-cat stood on the hill. Darkpaw stood up and signaled with her tail that they should check what was going on.

"What do you think this is about?" Stormpaw asked while they walked to the area. More cats began exiting their dens and settling around the area.

"Probably to announce Fallenpaw's new mentor," Darkpaw guessed.

Once the two reached the crowd, they settled next to each other and looked up to hear the leader's words.

Emberstar looked down at all of the cats. Not every cat was here yet. She scanned the crowd, her eyes passing Stormpaw and Darkpaw. Finally, the rest of the Clan members joined the crowd and her fur relaxed.

"As you all know," Emberstar began, "Russetheart was lost in the battle against CaveClan." Soft meows traveled through the crowd. "Russetheart was training this apprentice, Fallenpaw."

The light gray apprentice stepped up. Darkpaw hadn't realized she was there.

"Groundstripe and I have made our decision," Emberstar continued. "Beachface, you are ready for your first apprentice. You will continue Fallenpaw's training. May you pass on all of your knowledge and skills from your mentor, Maywind."

The young she-cat turned around, facing the crowd. Finally, a cream tabby tom stepped in front of the crowd in front of Fallenpaw. As soon as his name was said, Darkpaw immediately recognized this tom.

Nonetheless, Darkpaw's father was going to train Fallenpaw.

Chapter 2

[image]

"Wow," Stormpaw muttered. "That's Beachface, isn't it? Your father?" Darkpaw couldn't tear her eyes off him. She couldn't stop beaming. Her father was finally getting an apprentice! "Darkpaw? Hello?"

She shook her head. "Sorry. I got a bit distracted." She looked back up at her father who was standing in the clearing. The cream warrior bent down to touch noses with his new apprentice—although he didn't have to crouch as much since Fallenpaw was nearly his height.

Fallenpaw's yellow eyes darted toward Darkpaw, then away. *Is she all right?* Darkpaw wondered.

The Clan would usually cheer the apprentice's name, but Fallenpaw had already been apprenticed before. Instead, they congratulated Beachface on finally getting an apprentice after all he did for the Clan.

"I knew you always deserved an apprentice!" a pale cream she-cat with scars exclaimed. "And now you finally have one!"

"Thank you, Lilyfur," Beachface meowed. "Getting better after the battle with CaveClan?"

"Much," she purred. "I hope I never get to see their tails in our territory again."

"Clan meeting dismissed," Emberstar announced. The cats began to depart from the clearing and the red she-cat leaped down from the High Hill. "Beachface, Fallenpaw, I want you to meet me at my den at sundown." Emberstar turned and passed the vines hanging down from her den entrance, pushing through them. Darkpaw trotted over to her father and Fallenpaw.

"Wow! Congrats to both of you!" she meowed. Beachface

beamed while Fallenpaw gave a sheepish smile. Stormpaw came toward the two and gave a friendly meow. Darkpaw flicked his ear with her tail.

"I hope everything is going all right," Stormpaw mewed, glancing at Fallenpaw. The older apprentice nodded, then once again gave that quick flash to Darkpaw.

What's up with her? Darkpaw wondered, trying to figure out her expression. Was she sad? Angry? Upset? But why?

"I'll see you both later. I'm so tired, I could sleep on my paws." Stormpaw yawned.

"But there's still plenty of day left," Darkpaw teased.

"Just for a quick nap," he protested. He trotted to the apprentices' den and vanished into the darkness. Darkpaw stretched her jaws wide, yawning.

"You should go rest, too," Beachface suggested.

"But there's still so much of the day left!" Darkpaw protested, repeating what she said to Stormpaw. With another yawn of exhaustion, she admitted she was tired. "All right. Fine, you got me." Darkpaw trotted towards the apprentices' den, pushing her way through the curtain of vines. Stonepaw was back in the corner of the den, Stormpaw lying down in his usual spot. Smallpaw was making her nest neater while a black she-cat slept peacefully in the middle of the den. Darkpaw padded over to Stormpaw and settled on the nest beside him.

Darkpaw finally lay down, resting her head on her paws. She curled up into a ball with her tail around her hind paws. Darkpaw's sleep was still, blank darkness surrounding her. She groggily woke up when a paw was prodding her fur.

"Wake up, Darkpaw! You don't want to miss training, do you?" a familiar voice meowed. Darkpaw opened her eyes to see a calico tom prodding her. She slowly stood up, arching her back in a big stretch.

"Where are we training today?" she mewed. Rainfur smiled, waved his tail and exited the den. Darkpaw followed him outside of the camp, this time they were going north. Rainfur climbed down into a small valley with Darkpaw following him.

"The Deep Crevice. The clearing around it is perfect for training your tracking senses," Rainfur told her. Darkpaw gasped in amazement once she reached the bottom of the valley. Tiny flowers were blooming around a tear in the earth. She looked at him with worried eyes. "Don't worry, we'll stay clear from the crevice. I won't let you fall in." Darkpaw's fur on her shoulders lay flat again.

"The Deep Crevice is quite a popular training area," Rainfur went on as he padded by Darkpaw's side. "You'll likely come here a lot for training." Darkpaw nodded, gazing around the valley. A tiny stream flowed by and a variety of plants grew near the tear in the earth. They usually would train in large valleys or open grasslands. *Guess it's time I get used to this place,* Darkpaw remarked.

The two cats walked over to an area in the valley away from the Deep Crevice. "Tell me, what do you smell?" the calico tom asked. Darkpaw opened her jaws wide, drawing in the scents all around her. She could identify a couple of fresh scents and some stale ones.

"Sparrows and other birds. Some fresh, some stale," she told her mentor. "Although there's one scent I don't recognize." Rainfur opened his jaws, drawing in the scents. He narrowed his greenish-yellow eyes.

"It's a fox." Darkpaw's fur bristled. "But it's stale," he reassured her. She still stared at him. "I'll alert the deputy to keep a look out for the fox. Let's continue training. What other types of birds can you identify?"

"Lots of sparrows—fresh ones and stale ones," Darkpaw said.

"And?" Rainfur prompted. Darkpaw took in the scent and focused more.

"Stale hawk. And... maybe a duck was here." Rainfur nodded. Darkpaw gave her chest fur a few licks.

"Show me how to hunt a bird," Rainfur instructed her. Darkpaw dropped down into the hunter's crouch. She stalked quietly through the grass yet with quick paw movements. She did her every best to not make a sound. Then, she launched herself on top of a dandelion, her paws outstretched. She shredded the yellow flower with her claws.

"That was good, but maybe don't shred the bird when you're actually hunting," Rainfur suggested. Darkpaw nodded, sheathing her claws. "Rabbit."

As soon as her mentor said the prey's name, she dropped into a crouch. The wind was on her side. Being upwind, a rabbit wouldn't be able to smell her. She eyed a patch of clovers growing by a stream. As she stalked closer to them, she flew at them, biting the plants.

"Pleh!" she spat out the leaves as her mentor walked up to her to congratulate her. "Did I do well?"

"Yes, you did. Darkpaw, I have something to tell you." Darkpaw tensed, her ears perked up. Was her mentor going to point out one of her flaws? What had she done wrong?

"In three more sunrises, I'm taking you hunting with Snowstorm and Stormpaw," Rainpaw revealed. Darkpaw beamed. Stormpaw was right!

"Thank you, Rainfur!" Darkpaw exclaimed. Her blue eyes shined and she couldn't stop smiling. She purred with excitement as she thought of how soon she would go on a hunting patrol for her first time.

"Let's continue." Rainfur paused, opening his jaws for a moment. "There's a new scent in the area. Can you identify it?" he asked. Darkpaw circled the tall calico tom, opening her jaws wide as her scent glands drew in multiple scents. She could still scent the same things, with the duck scent becoming staler. Suddenly, she took in the new, fresh scent. Fresh scents. A flock of finches had landed nearby, the scent strong in her scent glands.

"A bunch of finches," Darkpaw mewed, turning to her mentor. "And the duck smell is fading away." Rainfur complimented her on spreading the smell from other birds.

"Darkpaw. Before you go on a hunting patrol with Snowstorm and Stormpaw, you have to hunt for yourself first," Rainfur said steadily. Darkpaw beamed with excitement.

"Really? Right now?!" she meowed.

"Quiet down," her mentor laughed playfully, "or you'll scare off all the prey!" Darkpaw sat down, her paws jittering with excitement. "We're going to use all your skills up to the test. Use everything you learned to catch prey. Track it down and use the right crouch to pounce on it." Darkpaw held her breath. She could feel all her skills and knowledge tingling in her paws as she waited for Rainfur to finish his instructions. "Now." He leaped out of the valley and skirted the edges, looking down at her. Darkpaw quickly put her skills to action.

She parted her jaws, drawing in scents in the valley. The fresh scent of finches masked the rest of her scents and she quickly dropped into the hunter's crouch. She could detect that a single finch had separated from the rest of its flock. Darkpaw followed the bird's scent and hid herself in a shrub. A finch was pecking at the grass where scattered seeds were. Darkpaw crept closer and closer with her claws unsheathed until—

Crack. She stepped on a twig and the finch immediately flew away, chirping loudly with alarm. The flock of finches flew away into the sky leaving Darkpaw disappointed. She sighed. She shook her head and opened her jaws. She would continue her search for prey to make Rainfur proud. She drew in the scent of rabbit. A rabbit had jumped into the valley quite recently. Darkpaw quickly made her movements fast but quiet as a brown rabbit sniffed the grass. As the rabbit looked up, she launched herself at it, paws outstretched, but the rabbit was too quick. It darted away out of the valley before Darkpaw could even land a paw on the ground.

"That one already detected your scent at first, but don't feel too bad," Rainfur said, coming down beside her. "I wasn't able to catch

prey on my first try. You're getting the hang of it." Rainfur looked as if he was about to add something else, but he remained silent. The calico walked out of the valley, watching Darkpaw once again. She felt more determined to catch her first prey now after hearing the words of Rainfur. She scented another rabbit that had wandered into the valley and quickly dropped down into a crouch. The rabbit was nearby and she quickly spotted it. StarClan was on her side; she was upwind so there wouldn't be any chance that the rabbit would detect her scent. She was sheltered in some plants, so it wouldn't see her either. She leaped into the air and landed on the rabbit, finishing it off with one bite. Happiness surged through Darkpaw's body. She caught her first prey! Rainfur trekked down the valley to stand beside her.

"Great job!" he meowed.

"I did it! I actually did it!" she exclaimed through the mouthful of prey. Darkpaw bounced around happily like an eager kit. She stopped and set down the rabbit. Crouching down, she eagerly added, "Can I eat it now?"

"No," Rainfur said. Darkpaw's tail drooped as she stood back on her paws. "The Clan must be fed first. Take it back to the elders." Darkpaw nodded, picking up the prey in her jaws. She was too eager to care that she wouldn't be able to eat her own fresh-kill. Rainfur led Darkpaw out of the valley and the two made their way back to camp.

Darkpaw ran down the slope and met up with Stormpaw. "I did it!" she meowed through the mouthful of the large rabbit. "I caught my own prey!"

"Wow!" he gasped. "I can't wait to catch my own, too." Darkpaw trotted to the elders' den and pushed through the curtain of vines.

"Got something to share?" asked a dusty gray tom. He limped towards her, nearly collapsing over. A ginger she-cat hopped over to help him up.

"You're the youngest of all of us yet you still need me to help you up," she bitterly meowed. "Ashkit?"

"That would be my brother. I'm Darkpaw," the apprentice corrected her. The ginger she-cat narrowed her eyes to slits and sat down. "My mentor Rainfur told me to give all of you this." She set down the rabbit. A blue-gray tom came over to inspect the piece of fresh-kill. Soon after, an old red she-cat joined them. Already, she was beginning to take a bite.

"Leave some for us, you furball," the blue-gray elder meowed, swatting his paw at her fur. He took a piece from the sparrow and began plucking out the feathers. Darkpaw sat down with her tail around her paws as the elders ate the fresh-kill. "Have some." The blue-gray elder pushed a piece of the fresh-kill to Darkpaw.

"No, thanks. I caught it for you, so you should have all of it," Darkpaw said. That only caused the elder to push it closer to her.

"So, what? So our growing apprentice can starve?" he scoffed. "Have a share." Darkpaw sighed and gratefully took the piece.

Before she began eating, she murmured, "Thanks, Lakeclaw." She swallowed the last piece of fresh-kill and swiped her tongue over her mouth. She began searching the den for a hint of a pointed colored tom, but he was nowhere to be seen. "Um," she began. "Where's Darkpelt?"

"That grumpy furball?" the ginger she-cat questioned. "He ventured off somewhere in camp. Doubt he'll be out for long once he realizes he can't do much without his vision." The elder began grooming herself, swiping her tongue over her paw and swiping her ear. She stretched and began padding outside.

"Where are you going, Sunleaf?" the dusty gray tom asked.

"Outside," she replied vaguely. "Where else would I go, Dustfoot?" She flicked the gray tom's ear with her tail and continued walking out, pushing through the curtain of vines. Darkpaw walked outside and went to meet up with her mentor who was talking to the deputy.

"She's a good apprentice. She'll make a good warrior one day," Groundstripe finished. Rainfur nodded.

"I feel like the hunting patrol should be sooner," Rainfur suggested.

"Stormpaw's training is a little behind, but he'll catch up. Just wait until it's time," the deputy meowed.

"But I have this feeling—" Rainfur began.

"Ah, there you are," Groundstripe meowed. Darkpaw sat beside Rainfur. "You've done well today, catching your first fresh-kill." Darkpaw couldn't help but smile.

"Thank you," Darkpaw meowed, dipping her head respectfully even though the excitement in her eyes betrayed her. After Darkpaw and Rainfur began to leave, a cream tabby warrior walked up to the deputy, his tail-tip twitching.

"Fallenpaw's the age of a warrior. She's got the basic skills of a warrior. So, why can't she become one now?" asked Beachface.

"It doesn't work that way. Due to her constantly swapping mentors, she hasn't gotten proper training. It'll be at least a moon or two before she's ready to become a full warrior," Groundstripe told him. Beachface grunted, but knew better than to argue with the deputy. He noticed Darkpaw and smiled at her.

"Great job on catching your first prey!" he meowed.

"Thanks," Darkpaw said, giving her chest a few licks to hide her embarrassment. As she did, she noticed the smile fading away from her father's face. Was something troubling him? He started padding away towards the warriors' den, leaving Darkpaw puzzled.

"You know... You could've shared some with me," Stormpaw grinned, padding beside her.

"You?" she meowed. "You'd eat all of the fresh-kill before any other cat could have a bite! Besides, elders and nursing queens must be fed first." Darkpaw playfully swatted at Stormpaw's ear. He jumped back and the two started a mock battle, rolling and jumping under and over each other. "Get off me you, furball!" Darkpaw exclaimed as the light gray tom sat on top of her. Stormpaw jumped

off of Darkpaw, leaving the she-cat's fur ruffled. She licked her fur in the right direction, paused, gazing towards the nursery. "I'd like to see how my littermates are doing."

"All right." Stormpaw grinned. He flicked his tail over her ear before racing over to his mentor. Darkpaw sat down to continue washing her ruffled fur.

Once Darkpaw finished grooming herself, she rose to her paws, padding over to the nursery. The nursery's entrance was small, so that a cat would have to duck their head to enter. Ferns grew by the entrance and a thick curtain of vines blocked other openings to the den. It was practically the safest den in the camp. The cream tabby walked into the nursery, her eyes adjusting to the dim light. Two nursing queens were quietly murmuring to each other as their bundles of fur played with each other. A queen with gray spots on her face had her tail curled around her only three-moon-old kit. A black she-cat abruptly stopped chatting and smiled when Darkpaw came in.

"Hi, Darkpaw," she meowed, waving her tail at her. She rose to her paws and walked over to her. Two cream and black furballs flew towards her, squealing with happiness.

"Hi, Darkpaw!" a black tomkit exclaimed.

"Do you think we can become apprentices yet?" asked a black-splotched cream tabby.

Their mother crouched to lick both of them on their heads. "Not yet. You still have to wait until you're both six-moons-old."

"But that's ages away!" one kit complained.

"I bet I'll be apprenticed before you, Ashkit!" the black kit challenged. Ashkit playfully tackled his brother to the ground, the two wrestling with one another. Darkpaw let out a *mrrow* of laughter, watching Nightkit and Ashkit tackle one another.

"What brings you here?" the black-furred queen asked.

"I just thought I'd go for a visit. I finished training today,"

Darkpaw told her. She did slightly miss the comfort of the nursery and seeing her littermates all the time. Yes, she loved being an apprentice, but she still felt comfortable in the dim lit den.

"Bluenight! A little help here!" exclaimed the fluffy white queen who was once chatting with her. Bluenight trotted over to the queen and helped her gather her two clumsy kits together. "These two won't stop racing away."

"It'll take time for them to listen more often, Cloudpelt," Bluenight meowed, nodding to her own two kits.

"If you say so," Cloudpelt sighed. "By any chance, have you seen Snowstorm recently?"

"No, why?"

"He told me he would bring back some fresh-kill for me," she meowed. "Just wondering if he forgot."

"He's probably out training Stormpaw," Darkpaw suggested. The fluffy white she-cat turned her gaze to her. "Most likely they're hunting for fresh-kill right now. I could hunt you some if you like."

"No need, but thank you, Darkpaw," Cloudpelt meowed. She swept her tail in front of her, bringing her kits closer to her. "Glamorkit, you need to stay in place. As for you, Wavekit, you can't go looking for Snowstorm outside."

"Then when is he coming back?" Wavekit wailed. Darkpaw couldn't help a *mrrow* of amusement rise from her throat.

Wavekit will be a determined warrior one day, and she'll help out the Clan a lot, Darkpaw thought.

"Soon." Cloudpelt sighed, washing her two kits, licking them on the heads. "Spottedface? What are you doing in that corner?"

"Skykit's nearly six-moons," the gray-spotted queen sighed. "I don't know what it'll be like, returning as a warrior again after so long." Spottedface looked out to the entrance. "I still wish that badger hadn't gotten Dustfoot. It'd be a real help if he could help

take care of this one." She nodded at the blue-eyed kit.

"Riverfur could help you," Bluenight responded. "She's already getting quite used to being a warrior again. She could guide you so you won't be too anxious about returning as a warrior."

"The thing is that Riverfur's only had one kit. She hasn't stayed in the nursery as long as me." Spottedface sighed. "Smallpaw became an apprentice recently and Stonepaw's been one. It's only a matter of time until Skykit leaves the nursery, too."

"I understand your worries, Spottedface," Bluenight began, "but ValleyClan needs more warriors than ever."

"I just wish I could stay here longer. It'll be tough, returning to the duties of a ValleyClan warrior," Spottedface murmured.

"It was good visiting you. I'll see you next time," Darkpaw mewed once it seemed that the queens had finished speaking with one another. She waved her tail in goodbye and ducked underneath the entrance. It was somewhat past sunhigh and warriors were already beginning to share tongues. A gray tomcat bounded up to her.

"Darkpaw! Darkpaw!" the older apprentice exclaimed. She whipped around to stare at him in confusion.

"Stonepaw, what is it?" she asked.

"Fallenpaw's new mentor, Beachface—is he related to you in some way?" Stonepaw asked.

"Um, yes. He's my father." Darkpaw stared at the gray apprentice. "Is something troubling you?" Darkpaw sat down, waiting for Stonepaw to speak. The gray tom hesitated for a moment before speaking again.

"Let's talk about this away from camp." The gray tom already began to pad towards the tunnel. Darkpaw immediately sat up, touching her tail on his shoulder.

"Why? Are we allowed to head out of camp?" she asked.

"We're apprentices, aren't we? Plus, I need somewhere private to speak," Stonepaw meowed. He continued to pad forward until Darkpaw spoke again.

"But we can't leave without a warrior's permission. Why not the apprentices' den?" she asked.

"A certain someone is there who I don't want to talk to," grunted Stonepaw. Darkpaw was about to open her mouth to suggest heading behind the medicine den when Stonepaw went on. "But fine. I guess we can tell someone." Darkpaw nodded warily as the gray apprentice ran over to the nearest warrior and conversed with them. The two nodded at each other and Stonepaw ran out of the camp. The cream tabby she-cat ran after him, nearly stepping on his tail.

"Stonepaw, I don't understand. What does this have to do with Beachface?" Darkpaw asked once they were out of earshot from the camp. The two settled near a patch of clovers by a stream. Darkpaw sat down next to Stonepaw. The gray-furred apprentice finished grooming his fur, facing Darkpaw with dark yellow eyes.

"I believe Beachface is in grave danger."

Unnamed Extra 1: Fallenpaw's Name

[image]

Darkpaw padded to the apprentices' den. She had just finished training with Rainfur. Stonepaw's words tugged at the back of her mind, circling in a loop. She pushed them away. She wanted to find rest, not worrying about a random theory Stonepaw came up with. Right...? After all, he was only an apprentice. But then again, Darkpaw was too. And he was older than her.

The cream tabby she-cat peered inside the den. As her blue eyes scanned the den, she spotted Smallpaw making her moss nest more comfortable and Fallenpaw farther in the back, snoozing. As she stepped in, she mewed a greeting to the gray-pointed she-cat.

"Hi, Smallpaw. What are you up to?" Darkpaw asked. She padded to her moss nest and began fixing the feathers lined around it.

"Nothing much. I could go for a piece of fresh-kill though," she added. "Would you like to come with me?"

"Sure!" Darkpaw exclaimed. As she rose to her paws, an unexpected meow sounded.

"May I come, too?" Darkpaw turned and spotted the light gray she-cat rising to her paws as well. She felt uneasy now that she had heard Stonepaw's theory. Would something happen to her father while he trained Fallenpaw? She shook her head. Fallenpaw was just like any other apprentice. And even if she did have a curse, she wouldn't have done it on purpose. But Darkpaw decided to stay cautious just in case.

"If you'd like," Smallpaw mewed. The three apprentices padded out of the den and across the camp to the fresh-kill pile. They stopped before a large tree that was surrounded by hunted prey.

Smallpaw leaned down and dragged a somewhat small rabbit toward Darkpaw. Fallenpaw picked up a plump finch in her jaws.

The gray-pointed she-cat took her share from the rabbit as Darkpaw promptly ate it. Smallpaw swiped her tongue across her muzzle, licking up the leftover fresh-kill. Just then, a pale cream warrior began trotting over to them.

"Smallpaw, Groundstripe wants you to go on a border patrol with me," meowed the pale cream she-cat.

Smallpaw nodded, then rose to her paws. She mewed a farewell to Darkpaw as she followed her mentor out of the camp. Darkpaw glanced at Fallenpaw, chewing, then swallowing.

"So..."

"I was..."

The two she-cats stared at each other in embarrassment. "You can go first!" they exclaimed at the same time.

"It's fine, it's fine," Darkpaw mewed. Fallenpaw's gaze dropped to her paws, then she looked back up at Darkpaw's face.

She stayed silent for a while, then shook her head. "Never mind. I have nothing to say," she replied.

Darkpaw narrowed her eyes, but nodded. She had to figure out the words she was going to say before both she-cats interrupted each other again. "So," she began, "I was thinking about your name."

"My name?" The light gray she-cat stared puzzled at her.

"Er, yes," Darkpaw answered awkwardly, realizing how weird this question would be. After a moment of hesitation, she continued. "Why were you named... No, sorry, it sounds too weird."

"It's all right," Fallenpaw meowed. "Come to think of it, I don't really remember. Maybe we should ask Blueheart." Darkpaw nodded, then realized why Fallenpaw chose to say that wariror's name. The brown-pointed she-cat was padding across the camp to

the fresh-kill pile with two birds and a mouse in her jaws. She dropped them at the foot of the tree.

"Blueheart?" Fallenpaw meowed. The cream she-cat turned to look at the light gray apprentice. "I want to ask something."

"Oh, sure! What is it?" she meowed, sitting down to listen.

"When I was born, why did Frostclaw and Lionmane name me Fallenkit?" she asked.

"Hm. Right. Fallenpaw. I do remember them being overjoyed by the pattern of your fur," she began. Blueheart looked up and down at Fallenpaw's light gray fur and black cape with golden-orange flecks scattered across it. "They said that you looked like a cat from StarClan who had fallen down from the stars back here. So they named you Fallenkit."

Darkpaw's blue eyes glimmered in awe. She hadn't noticed it before, but just as the way Blueheart described, she could see it now. Fallenpaw's white paws were white as stars, and the golden-orange flecks were the color of the moon.

"So they named me Fallenkit..." Fallenpaw muttered. "I never knew that was the reason."

"Guess we all learn something new every sunrise," Darkpaw jumped in. Darkpaw glanced uneasily at Fallenpaw. *A cat from StarClan,* she remarked. What if her name meant something? After all, every warrior earned their name somehow. Darkpaw was named after her unusual cream and black coloring. So, the dark black in her fur gave her her name. If Fallenpaw was named after a kit falling from the stars, then could that mean she *could* have special powers?

Cursed by StarClan, Stonepaw's voice echoed. Darkpaw shivered. Although her father and her were close, she felt the need to be closer with him than ever, to protect him in case.

A/N: Hello, readers! Sorry it took so long to update this book, but here we are! So I may do a bit more of these little extras in

the story, but they won't replace the chapters, so don't worry! Now, the real reason why I've been taking so long to update is because I'm going over my chapters. I've already pre-written a few, but that was before I began reading The New Prophecy. Now, I'm going over my old chapters from when I read The Prophecies Begin to revise it and make it more accurate to Warriors. I hope you enjoyed this short story! See you again next time!

Chapter 3

[image] [image]

Happy Halloween! I present to you an extra-long chapter. Enjoy!

*"I believe Beachface is in grav*e danger." The words rang in Darkpaw's head over and over. *Is Stonepaw right? Is he really in danger?* Darkpaw fretted. Stonepaw had speculated about Darkpaw's father's apprentice, Fallenpaw.

"All the warriors who have mentored her have died in some way," Stonepaw mused.

"But, that's just a coincidence, right?" Darkpaw murmured quietly, worry gnawing at her. She couldn't get the thought that training Fallenpaw would put her father in danger out of her head. So, she had asked more questions. "Fallenpaw can't have some magical curse that kills all her mentors, right?"

"StarClan know what? Our warrior ancestors could have cursed her somehow," Stonepaw continued. He had explained his theory of how Fallenpaw might have been cursed, so that every cat who tried mentoring her would be killed in the end. Stonepaw had made very believable claims about it. After all, it was believed that the Sacred Honey Oak was guaranteed to help safely guide a cat who passed away to StarClan if its body was set beneath there before sundown. So, it wasn't too unbelievable that StarClan may have set a curse on a cat.

"Darkpaw?" The cream tabby she-cat snapped out of her thoughts, looking around wildly. Her eyes landed on a calico tom whose tail-tip was resting on her shoulder.

"Uh—yeah. Sorry, Rainfur," she mewed. To cover her embarrassment, she gave her chest fur a few licks.

"It's all right. Can you see the Claws of Creeks coming into

view?" Rainfur asked. Darkpaw looked out to the far distance as the two cats kept pacing northeast. She could see large streams beside each other all emptied out into the river.

"Yes?" Darkpaw replied, unsure. "What's a creek?"

"Basically a smaller version of a river. In this particular part of the territory, there are multiple creeks all in one area." Rainfur pointed with his tail at the creeks. "We call them Claws of Creeks because they're fanned out like unsheathed claws." Rainfur swiped at the air in demonstration, claws unsheathed.

Darkpaw gasped in amazement as the two cats stopped. In front of them lay brooks that emptied out into the river that separated ValleyClan and SavannaClan's territory.

"We're hunting here today?" Darkpaw asked, wondering what type of prey she would catch.

"No. We're here to renew the border markings, so SavannaClan knows to keep their tails out of our territory," Rainfur told her. Darkpaw's tail drooped. "Hey, protecting our borders is just as important as hunting for the Clan!" Rainfur teasingly poked her shoulder with his tail. Darkpaw jumped back, her tail lashing.

"But isn't that something *patrols* have to worry about? Not training?" Darkpaw pointed out.

Rainfur paused. "Yes, but ever since, ValleyClan has only had so many cats. These duties have been split between the warriors now." Rainfur flicked Darkpaw's ear with his tail, aiming for a brighter opportunity. "Shall we?"

Darkpaw nodded, eager to push away the thought of how many cats had been lost in the previous moons, and continue with training. She realized that she had put her mind off of Stonepaw and his theory.

And it better stay like that. She didn't want to worry about her father. After all, he was a warrior. He should be able to take care of himself.

"Follow me." The calico tom began bounding toward the creeks, his tail streaming out from behind him with Darkpaw hard on his paws. Rainfur skidded to a stop at the edge of a creek. "We have to get to the Island Bridge to mark our part of the territory," Rainfur explained.

"But, isn't it past all these creeks?" Darkpaw tilted her head. Rainfur dipped his paw in the water and stared at her. "What?! I don't want to get my fur wet!" Darkpaw protested.

"Then maybe you should've stayed back at camp," Rainfur mused.

"Wait—! I want to come! But isn't there a path to get to the Island Bridge *without* having to swim?" she asked.

"Yes, but this is the shortest route. Plus, you'll need to learn how to swim if you want to defend the River against CaveClan one day," Rainfur told her. Unfortunately, he was right. ValleyClan and CaveClan usually had battles over the River, plentiful with fish. If she wanted to defend it, she would have to learn how to swim. Darkpaw winced upon gazing at the stretch of water. "Now come along." The calico tomcat leaped into the creek, splashing droplets of water all over the cream tabby.

"Yuck!" Darkpaw exclaimed as she shook her soaked pelt, scattering droplets everywhere. Darkpaw swallowed hard and began to sink her paw in the cold water. She jumped back, shaking her paw dry. As a kit, she had attempted to swim in the small stream that wound around the Tall Hill. She had been dared by Stormkit to swim in it. Darkpaw had taught herself to paddle in it yet she hated how it felt.

Clearing her mind, she began to sink the rest of her fur into the water, shivering. Soon, she found herself wading through the water, trying to keep herself afloat. The farther she went, the harder it was to keep above the surface. She hated how cold the water was compared to the warm sunlight of greenleaf.

She successfully made it to the other side and looked up. Rainfur was already swimming across another creek. Darkpaw reluctantly

didn't shake her fur dry, since it was only going to get wet again. She began swimming across the second creek, trying to catch up with her mentor. The current of the creek swept water onto her nose and ears. The cream she-cat flicked her ears dry as she made it across to the other side.

"How many more?" she groaned.

"This is the last one." Rainfur pointed his tail at the last creek in their way, with fast currents splashing on the grass that grew beside it. The dirt was soaked to the point it was mud, and this creek was much wider than the other two. Darkpaw shrank away from it.

"*That?*" she asked in disbelief. "I'm going to be swept away before I can even get the chance to swim properly!" She began to turn back when Rainfur stopped her.

"We'll go together. You're an apprentice, not a kit." Her mentor came over to her side, brushing his tail-tip against her shoulder. Darkpaw sighed then turned to follow him. She felt her watered fur weigh her down as she began to step into the river. Wobbily on her paws with the weight, Darkpaw was caught off guard at the sudden change in the current. She fell face-first into the water and fought the current to stay afloat as brown water churned around her and swept over her head, dragging her under.

"*Darkpaw*!" came Rainfur's muffled voice. Darkpaw's vision was blurred in dark, muddy water. She panicked to get back to the surface as she began running out of air. She squeezed her eyes shut, trying not to get the stinging water in her eyes and reached in front of her, hoping her claws could grab onto something, so she could haul herself out of the water. Her paw waved helplessly, touching nothing but the freezing water. Water filled her mouth, eyes, and ears, the taste of the mud making her want to retch. She opened her mouth in an attempt to yell out to her mentor, but no sound came out.

Darkpaw felt water filling her lungs. She choked, trying to cough it out. She blindly twisted around, trying to get back to the surface. *Is this how I'm going to die?* Darkpaw thought in a panic. She was just about ready to give up, when she felt teeth fasten into her scruff

and suddenly, she was lifted out of the water.

"Darkpaw!" Rainfur exclaimed again. The apprentice began coughing and spitting, trying to get her mind clear. The currents had pulled her under and threatened to drown her. Darkpaw dug her claws into the ground, weary that she would be dragged under again. Spluttering out the last droplets of water, Darkpaw's eyes flew open and saw a calico tomcat standing over her with the strong scent of fear coming off him in waves.

"Darkpaw, are you all right?" her mentor breathed. He crouched down beside her and licked her fur the wrong way to help dry out the water. Darkpaw stayed crouched on the ground, shaken by what just happened.

"Y-yeah," she mewed, her voice quavering. As her shock began to ease, she rose to her paws and shook her pelt dry. Rainfur brushed his flank against hers and his fear scent began to fade.

"I-I thought I lost you there," he mewed. Giving Darkpaw a few licks again, he asked, "Do you... do you want to keep going?"

Darkpaw looked up, staring at the last creek in their path. The Island Bridge was so close, only a few fox-lengths away. "Y-yes," Darkpaw stammered, trying to keep her voice steady. She didn't want to miss her apprentice training after how far they had come. "I'll be more careful this time." The two cats once again began padding into the water. When a current almost swept Darkpaw away again, Rainfur fastened his teeth into her scruff, hauling her up from the water. He let go and she continued to swim. The cold water slapped unevenly at her flanks, making her feel sick. Finally, the two made it across to the other side, both cats' sides heaving.

Darkpaw shook her pelt dry right before Rainfur did. Darkpaw's fur became soaked again when the warrior shook droplets at her. Darkpaw hissed in annoyance as her mentor mewed a sheepish apology. Annoyed, she washed her fur while her fear of drowning ebbed away.

Darkpaw's cream pelt was smeared with mud and Rainfur's legs and belly were soaked brown. She felt the urge to wash more, but

they had to get on with training.

"We're almost there," Rainfur told her. Darkpaw looked ahead of them to see a large stretch of land crossing the river to SavannaClan territory.

"Wow! It's so big!" Darkpaw gasped in amazement. Rainfur ran to the Island Bridge with Darkpaw following him. Once the two reached the edge of it, Rainfur began to renew the border markings.

"Why aren't we marking it further?" Darkpaw asked, waving her tail at all the space left ahead.

"Most of the Island Bridge belongs to SavannaClan right now. But I know one day we'll take it back," Rainfur meowed, flexing his claws. Darkpaw helped renew the scent markings of the landmass. She finished and sat down, swatting her paws at blades of grass. Her mentor finished and padded up to Darkpaw.

"Tomorrow's the day."

"Hunting!" Darkpaw exclaimed, already knowing what he meant. "I can't wait!"

"Before we head back to camp, let me test your scenting skills." The calico tom nudged Darkpaw forward toward the west. The young apprentice paused, then opened her jaws as her scent glands drew in everything around her. She could detect a stale scent of duck coming from the river. Stale scent of rabbit. And a fresh scent. The same unfamiliar one she had scented before.

As she tried to remember what the scent was, she ran toward Rainfur's side and screeched, "Fox!"

"Is it fresh?" he asked, panic ebbing in him.

"It is," Darkpaw mewed with alarm. "Should we alert the other warriors?"

Rainfur nodded. "You are right, Darkpaw. Let's head back for the day."

Darkpaw couldn't help but feel disappointed with the fact that her training was being cut short today. *But there's tomorrow! Hunting with Stormpaw!* Her eyes glimmered at the thought of going on her first, real hunting patrol with her best friend.

As Rainfur began to move, Darkpaw trotted up to him. "Can we take the non-swimming way, please?" she mewed, hope sparkling in her blue eyes. Rainfur let out a purr of amusement.

"Okay, fine. Come on then." Rainfur headed away from the Claws of Creeks, and towards the hills. The calico tom fell into a run as Darkpaw bounded after him. The two were already halfway across the territory by sunhigh, and Darkpaw scented the scents of her Clanmates at camp ahead.

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Darkpaw listened in amazement as Stormpaw described his battle training. The light gray tom was eagerly telling her all about it, demonstrating each move he had been taught.

"And suddenly Snowstorm rolled over and kicked me with his hind legs!" Stormpaw exclaimed. "He sent me flying all the way to the oak!"

Darkpaw's tail-tip flicked in fascination. "You have to tell me more!"

As Stormpaw went on about battle techniques, Darkpaw glanced over her shoulder, hearing her name being mentioned. She saw Rainfur reporting how they found the fox to Groundstripe. The brown tabby tom cast a look at Darkpaw, murmuring something she couldn't hear. She turned her attention back to Stormpaw.

"Battle training is so fun!" he finished. His eyes grew round. "I can't wait for tomorrow!"

"Me too!" Darkpaw agreed. She beamed, falling into the hunter's crouch, pretending to pounce on a mouse. The cream tabby she-cat spun around to face Stormpaw again.

"Let's get some fresh-kill!" she mewed. Stormpaw nodded and the

two padded toward the tree in the center of camp. A rabbit lay on the roots of the tree and a plump thrush sat opposite. Darkpaw picked out a vole while Stormpaw took a mouse. The two sat by each other. Darkpaw ravenously dug into her vole while Stormpaw gingerly nibbled at his mouse. She glanced over at him.

"Not much appetite?" she asked.

Stormpaw didn't answer.

"Storm—?"

The light gray tabby blinked suddenly, as if snapping out of some deep thought. "Ah! Uh—yes." He rested his head on his white paws.

Darkpaw eyed her denmate. "I'll be in the apprentices' den if you need me," she mewed. Darkpaw grabbed her fresh-kill in her jaws, slowly rising to her paws and padding away.

I hope he's doing alright.

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Darkpaw yawned, stretching out her hind legs and shaking her forepaws. Her whiskers twitched as she heard pawsteps approach. Sitting up, she watched as a short-furred black she-cat quietly slithered into the den. Her blue eyes sparked as if a fox had stolen her fresh-kill. Darkpaw pulled her tail closer to her paws as the apprentice almost stepped on it. Darkpaw saw this cat often, but she never really talked to her.

"Hi," she mewed. The black she-cat glanced over.

"Hey," she mumbled. "You just became an apprentice, right?"

"*Just?* I've been an apprentice for a few sunrises now!" Darkpaw corrected.

The black she-cat suppressed a mrrow of laughter, though the glimmer of amusement in her eyes gave it away. Darkpaw glared at her.

"Alright then," she meowed. "Name's Risingpaw. Yours?" As Darkpaw opened her mouth to speak, the black apprentice went on. "Wait. Let me guess. Is it... Sandpaw?"

Darkpaw blinked.

"Wait, no. There aren't any cats in this Clan named Sandpaw. How about... Stripekit?"

"I'm not a kit!" Darkpaw meowed indignantly.

Risingpaw burst out laughing. "Okay... then how about...?"

Darkpaw's tail-tip twitched with annoyance. She was growing impatient with this pointless small talk. Then again, she was the one who greeted Risingpaw first. But she wanted Risingpaw to stop teasing her. "It's Darkpaw, okay?" she quickly answered before Risingpaw could go on.

"Oh, right. Darkpaw," she meowed thoughtfully. Darkpaw rolled her eyes. The black she-cat was kneading her moss nest. She looked distracted, and distant as if she had already forgotten Darkpaw was there. That same fierceness in her eyes returned, and the air was filled with tension.

Darkpaw was filled with unease. Should she say something? The tabby apprentice kept watching Risingpaw. Suddenly, Risingpaw unsheathed her claws and tore out some moss from the nest.

The moss clinged to the black she-cat's claws. She shook them, and the scraps went flying. A scrap toppled just by Darkpaw's paws.

Darkpaw flinched, almost jumping. She looked back at Risingpaw who had paused. Her mind seemed to be somewhere else. She should say something, Darkpaw decided, to break the tension in the air. Darkpaw raised her voice.

"Uh, Risingpaw? Are you okay?"

The black she-cat jerked her head to Darkpaw, her eyes wide and her fur bristling. Darkpaw sank her claws into the ground, not expecting such hostility. Then, Risingpaw's blue eyes softened, and

she turned away.

"Sorry," she meowed.

Darkpaw sheathed her claws. She stared back at Risingpaw. "What's wrong?" she pressed on.

Risingpaw's tail lashed. Darkpaw leaned back, afraid the older apprentice would whip around and leap at her, but Risingpaw instead let out a sigh. She sat down, looking at her paws.

"I've been stuck in camp for days." Darkpaw opened her mouth to ask why, but Risingpaw had already swept on. "Blueheart's too busy looking after Darkpelt, and she is always looking after the other apprentices. It's like she's forgotten I'm here!

"And even when I approach her, she somehow makes an excuse to go off somewhere else." Risingpaw had crouched deep inside her nest. "Is she avoiding me? Does she hate me?"

"Blueheart would never hate any cat!" Darkpaw mewed, eyes round. She stared at Risingpaw in dismay. Had her mentor really been ignoring her?

"Then why does every cat act like I'm a goose in a duck's family?!" Risingpaw snapped.

Darkpaw shrank away, the older apprentice's hackles raised.

"I don't fit in—all the other warriors act as if I was born from the sky! *Maybe if my mother and father were still alive, I'd have someone to defend me!*" Risingpaw was gasping for breath now, her legs shaking. Darkpaw stared at her, her own paws trembling.

"I hate this place! Maybe I'm meant to be a rogue!" Risingpaw declared, her blue eyes sparking with anger.

Darkpaw gasped in horror, staring at her. How could she hate ValleyClan? It was her home! Before she could speak, Risingpaw dashed out of the den. Darkpaw started after her, scrabbling on the moss on the ground, and bolted out into the clearing. Warriors were staring at the slope that led out of the camp. As Darkpaw followed

their gazes, she saw a black tail vanish out of sight.

Murmurs of confusion filled the air. Blueheart trotted to Darkpaw.

"Was that Risingpaw?" she asked, her eyes wide with concern.

She does *care about her!* Darkpaw nodded. Blueheart's eyes grew round in dismay and she whipped around towards the entrance.

"Blueheart, wait." Before the brown-pointed she-cat could go after her apprentice, a red she-cat blocked her path.

Emberstar!

"Risingpaw must have a good reason to dash out of camp like that," she meowed steadily to Blueheart. "Darkpaw." Emberstar turned her green gaze to her.

Darkpaw felt her claws sink into the ground as the ValleyClan leader addressed her. "Y-yes?" she mewed, trying to keep her voice from trembling.

"Do you know what happened? Why did Risingpaw rush out of camp?" Emberstar asked.

Darkpaw looked around, all the warriors' attention on her. *Do I tell them about our conversation? What if Blueheart gets hurt? What if I get blamed for pressing Risingpaw?*

She turned her gaze back on Emberstar, the red leader's eyes serious. Darkpaw swallowed her doubt and opened her mouth.

"Risingpaw's upset," she told them.

"That's too vague!" Blueheart hissed. Darkpaw flattened her ears.

"Calm down, both of you." Emberstar rested her gaze on Blueheart. "I know you're worried about your apprentice but you shouldn't take it out on Darkpaw."

Blueheart held her gaze, then turned to Darkpaw. "I'm sorry," she

murmured.

Darkpaw suppressed a sigh of relief. She was glad that the warrior wasn't angry at her. Then Emberstar turned to Darkpaw. She meowed, "Can you please tell us more?"

Darkpaw nodded, aware that Stormpaw was staring intently at her. She glanced at him. He was sitting beside Riverfur, his eyes sparking. *You can do this, Darkpaw.* She knew that was what he meant to say. They had been friends for so long they could nearly read each other's thoughts. Darkpaw looked back at Emberstar. "Risingpaw thinks she's better off a rogue."

"What?!" Blueheart exclaimed. She stared at her in disbelief. "What do you mean?"

Around her, the camp was muttering.

"Really? Leave ValleyClan to be a rogue?"

"That's the most mouse-brained idea I've ever heard!"

"Well, it does make sense since..."

Emberstar jerked her head up, raising her voice. "*Quiet.*" The camp hushed as the leader made the order. Emberstar's whiskers twitched in satisfaction, and she turned to address the Clan. "Every cat has its reasons. Risingpaw has hers." She turned and flicked her tail. A dark brown tabby padded to her. "Groundstripe, I want you to send a search party for Risingpaw."

The deputy dipped his head. Groundstripe turned and waved his tail at the cats he wanted to come with him. "Snowstorm, lead a patrol as far as the Island Bridge. Lilyfur, Smallpaw, accompany me to the CaveClan border," he meowed.

Snowstorm went to talk to the cats he was bringing with him. The white tom went over to Stormpaw. The apprentice eagerly got to his paws as his mentor selected him for the patrol. Snowstorm padded to the far side of the clearing. Beachface and Fallenpaw were standing near each other.

Darkpaw stared at Fallenpaw, Stonepaw's words suddenly crashing down on her. What if this was Beachface's last patrol? What if something would happen at the Island Bridge? She sank her claws into the ground as Snowstorm briefly chatted with the two.

"Of course," Beachface meowed. Fallenpaw silently watched.

Darkpaw felt frustration nagging at herself. Why was she so wary of her denmate? Stonepaw was just an apprentice like her, so she needn't worry about Fallenpaw.

The light gray apprentice followed Beachface as Snowstorm took the patrol with him. Stormpaw paused, then turned to Darkpaw.

"See you later!" he called. He quickened his pace to catch up with the patrol.

Darkpaw couldn't help but envy her friend. Soon, she would accompany him on a patrol.

Soon? she thought. *How about... now?*

Darkpaw couldn't bear the thought of seeing her father leave with Fallenpaw. So, perhaps she could join him on his patrol... in secret. Not only did she want to be there for her father, but she wanted to come with Stormpaw. Darkpaw waited as the noise in the clearing died down and cats returned to their dens. Emberstar watched the patrols go, then turned to head back to her own den. Blueheart was pawing the ground anxiously, while Riverfur headed to the elders' den, probably to see her mate Darkpelt.

Darkpaw spotted her mentor at the entrance of the camp. The calico warrior was guarding it. *Can't go that way,* Darkpaw thought. She tried to be nonchalant as she headed for the dirtplace tunnel. Darkpaw stalked through the tunnel, wrinkling her nose at the odor. Suddenly, cat-scent filled her nostrils, startling Darkpaw. She jumped back into fronds of ferns as she spotted Bluenight leaving the tunnel. That was close! Darkpaw's fur bristled, hoping her mother hadn't seen her.

Once the black queen had left, Darkpaw continued slinking

along the grass through the tunnel. Darkpaw saw light ahead, and quickened her pace. The tunnel opened out, and Darkpaw breathed in the fresh air, the scent of dirtplace still lingering in her nose.

Darkpaw pricked her ears. The patrol had left a while ago. She tasted the air. Darkpaw caught the familiar scents of Groundstripe's patrol heading towards the River. Darkpaw tasted the air again, padding a bit farther out. She caught the whiff of a tom's scent—she recognized Stormpaw immediately. It was still fresh, but the patrol had long since moved on.

Darkpaw dropped down into a crouch and began tracking the patrol's scent. It led her towards the Claws of Creeks. Darkpaw forced her fur to smooth at the thought of going back there. The cream she-cat's whiskers quivered.

Suddenly, the patrol veered away from the creeks and away into the hills. As Darkpaw followed, she began to think it may take too long to follow the patrol over the hills. The patrol was several fox-lengths ahead of her. She wouldn't be able to catch up in time before they reached the Island Bridge. Swallowing a prick of doubt, she retraced her pawsteps and headed to the Claws of Creeks.

Darkpaw sniffed the edge of the water, each hair trembling. *It's okay, you can do this!* Darkpaw braced herself and plunged into the freezing waters. She struggled to keep her head above the surface as the mucky water slapped against her face. Darkpaw lifted her muzzle and gasped for breath, then plunged under.

To her surprise, she found it easier to swim beneath the surface. Every once in a while, she resurfaced to breathe then continued to swim. Finally, she had nearly swam across all the creeks.

Smeared with mud, Darkpaw stared at the last creek, the one she had nearly drowned in. Its currents seemed calmer than last time, but she couldn't take any risks. Darkpaw suddenly realized how exhausted she was. She had been swimming for half the day. When she went out to train with Rainfur, they had swam all the creeks to renew the border markings of the Island Bridge. Darkpaw gave her pelt a shake, trying to shake off her exhaustion. As Darkpaw prepared to fight the currents once again, she suddenly caught a

scent.

Fox. Darkpaw's fur bristled as she scented the creature. Ready to flee, she perceived the scent was stale. Darkpaw tried locating where it came from, then realized the fox scent was all over the bank she was standing on. Darkpaw arched her back, her eyes scouring the area for the invisible fox. Her eyes widened as she saw a bundle of red fur near the shore. Darkpaw tasted the air. It was the fox, but it was dead.

Darkpaw warily approached it. The fox lay half-drowned, the water lapping its muzzle while its body lay on the shore. The fox's fur was matted with blood and Darkpaw saw that there were claw marks all across its flank.

What had killed the fox? And why? Darkpaw tentatively took another step forward and sniffed the fox. Although it was very hard to tell, the stale scent of cat was clear.

This is a ValleyClan cat's scent! Darkpaw realized. Backing away from the fox, she looked over the creek again. She finally noticed why the currents were so calm—a cat's body was half-submerged in the water, causing the currents to flow unevenly.

Darkpaw gasped as she recognized the black pelt of Risingpaw at the far side of the creek. Without a second thought, she plunged into the waters and swam to the other side, fighting against the tide. She kicked at the water as fast as she could, reaching out in front of her with her forepaws.

StarClan, please don't let her be dead! Darkpaw had no idea how to check if a cat was still alive. Once she climbed into the bank, she nosed through Risingpaw's fur, hoping she was still breathing. Darkpaw's ears pricked as she heard Risingpaw's short, shallow breathing. Risingpaw's fur was plastered to her skin—had she been swimming?

Darkpaw flattened her ears in dismay. Had she drowned? She needed to get her back to camp to see Whitetail! But how?

Darkpaw's fur bristled as she heard a yowl in the distance. She

looked ahead and could see the small shapes of the ValleyClan patrol. But there were other cats at the Island Bridge.

SavannaClan! Was it a border skirmish?

Darkpaw urged herself to dash over and help her Clanmates but she couldn't leave Risingpaw. Darkpaw looked back to the black she-cat, barely breathing. *I need to carry her back to camp!*

But how? She was only an apprentice. She was only six moons with barely any training. So, how was she supposed to help Risingpaw?

Darkpaw nosed Risingpaw's fur, her whiskers trembling. "It's going to be okay," Darkpaw mewed desperately. "I'll get you to Whitetail and a nice warm moss nest!" She was mostly reassuring herself rather than Risingpaw.

Darkpaw fastened her teeth onto the loose skin of Risingpaw. She began to heave the older apprentice up by the scruff, struggling to stay on four paws. Darkpaw found it difficult to handle Risingpaw's weighed pelt. *Stupid water!* Darkpaw grunted.

The young apprentice struggled to drag Risingpaw across the ground. Darkpaw paused, trying to gasp for breath around the black she-cat's scruff. Her eyes darted around fretfully, wishing a warrior was here to help her. Another screech erupted from afar. The border skirmish was still going on.

As Darkpaw turned to look, her eyes widened in horror as she saw her Clanmates being driven back by the SavannaClan warriors. *There's so many!* Darkpaw felt the sudden urge to race to her Clanmates to fight them off. She blinked. Was that...?

She could see a small shape in the distance growing larger. Darkpaw recognized the feline silhouette. Her fur bristled. Was a SavannaClan cat heading straight for her? Unsheathing her claws, she got ready to fight.

Her fur relaxed as the shape came closer. "Stormpaw?!" she exclaimed around Risingpaw's fur.

The light gray apprentice skidded to a stop, his eyes wide. "Darkpaw? Is that Risingpaw?" He flicked his tail to the black she-cat.

Darkpaw nodded. She gently let go of Risingpaw's scruff to speak clearly. "What's wrong? Why are you here?"

Stormpaw's ear flicked. "I'd like to ask the same. But now's not the time. We're outnumbered. Snowstorm sent me to go back to camp for help."

Darkpaw's blue eyes widened in horror. "We're losing?" she squealed.

Stormpaw nodded. His eyes drew to Risingpaw. "Is she dead?"

Darkpaw shook her head. Her eyes wide, she fastened her teeth onto the black apprentice's scruff. "We need to take her back to camp," she mumbled.

Stormpaw nodded. "I'll help. I was going to swim through the creeks but we can't do that while carrying Risingpaw. Let's take her over the hills." Stormpaw padded over to help shoulder Risingpaw's weight.

Darkpaw swallowed her doubt away. *I'm sure we can make it in time to save Risingpaw and help Beachface and the others,* she told herself.

***

The journey over the hills was long and tiring. Darkpaw was starving and Stormpaw was exhausted by the time they saw the camp come into view. Darkpaw felt as if her paws would collapse from right under her. A flicker of hope shimmered in her chest at the sight of the familiar valley her Clan lived in.

Darkpaw paused as Stormpaw signaled his tail. She followed his gaze, then noticed a patrol in view. Stormpaw slowly placed down Risingpaw and Darkpaw followed suit.

"Smallpaw! Lilyfur!" Stormpaw yowled. The patrol stopped, their

ears angled. The gray-pointed apprentice's eyes widened as she saw the two. The cats came bounding over.

"Stormpaw, where are the others?" she asked.

"No time to explain, we have to—"

"Is that Risingpaw?" Lilyfur asked urgently, her hackles raised.

Darkpaw nodded. "We have to get her to Whitetail. She tried swimming but drowned," Darkpaw explained. The look on Lilyfur's face was replaced with seriousness.

"Smallpaw, go back to camp and let Emberstar know. Oh, and tell her Darkpaw's alright, too," Lilyfur instructed.

Smallpaw nodded. She turned and dashed back to camp. Darkpaw felt her pelt hot. Had the Clan noticed she was gone?

Lilyfur leaned down to grab Risingpaw by the scruff. Darkpaw was relieved to no longer be carrying the apprentice. She followed the warrior, Stormpaw at her side.

"What were you doing?" Stormpaw hissed into Darkpaw's ear.

"What do you mean?" she whispered back.

"Why were you with Risingpaw? Weren't you at camp?" he asked.

Darkpaw felt her pelt hot with embarrassment. "I followed your patrol," she admitted.

Stormpaw narrowed his eyes. "We have to ask for permission before leaving camp," he pointed out.

"I know." Darkpaw hung her head in shame.

Stormpaw sighed. "At least you found Risingpaw," he murmured.

As they entered camp, Darkpaw's belly rumbled at the sight of the fresh-kill pile. She dashed forward and grabbed a mouse,

ravenously eating it.

Licking her lips, she rose to her paws and saw Lilyfur entering the medicine den with Risingpaw. As she turned back to look for Stormpaw, she jumped back in surprise.

"Darkpaw." Her mentor, Rainfur, stood before her.

Darkpaw stared at her paws, shame engulfing her as she awaited a scolding from the calico. She didn't look up as he spoke. "You shouldn't have snuck out of camp. You worried the Clan sick!"

Darkpaw didn't reply. What could she say? Wanting to follow Stormpaw's patrol wasn't a good enough reason to have snuck out of camp. Her tail drooped. Would she be punished?

She lifted her head as she heard a familiar call. "ValleyClan, gather around!" On top of the Tall Hill was Emberstar. Her words rang around the clearing as the Clan gathered. Rainfur joined them, Darkpaw following.

"Risingpaw has been found. Whitetail is tending to her at this moment. But there is a battle at the Island Bridge. I want those who are fit enough to fight to help back up our Clanmates," Emberstar meowed.

Groundstripe raised his voice. "Those who wish to join the battle, gather around me."

As much as Darkpaw wanted to stay home and rest, she knew her Clan needed her. She bounded forward.

"You're not going," meowed Rainfur from behind her. Darkpaw turned around.

"But—" she began.

"No buts," he meowed firmly. Darkpaw felt her paws surge with disappointment. Why couldn't he just let her do something for her Clan?

She felt a muzzle nose her shoulder. She turned. "It's alright,"

Stormpaw mewed. "I think you've done enough with playing the hero today, saving Risingpaw and all."

Darkpaw sighed. "I guess." Her shoulders slump. "I just don't think it's fair I'm being excluded!" she mewed indignantly.

Stormpaw let out a *mrrow* of laughter. "Well, *I* think you should rest, so you have enough energy for tomorrow!" he exclaimed.

Darkpaw's tail shot up. "That's right! We're going on our first hunting patrol tomorrow!"

"See you soon!" Stormpaw mewed. Darkpaw realized the patrol was getting ready to leave. In the patrol were Groundstripe, Blueheart, Riverfur, Smallpaw, and Stormpaw. It seemed as if the whole of ValleyClan was joining the patrol. *SavannaClan won't stand a chance!* Darkpaw thought proudly. She watched as the patrol padded out of camp, and away from view.

Darkpaw yawned, realizing how sleepy she was. Rainfur flicked his tail over her ear affectionately. "You should get some rest," he advised.

Darkpaw nodded, blinking tiredly. Her belly still rumbled, but she was too exhausted to eat some fresh-kill before heading to her den. On heavy paws, she padded to the apprentice's den.

I can't wait for tomorrow! she thought happily.

Update

[image]

Anyone else having writer's block? It sucks. I'm not even halfway done with the next chapter. I'm even having a struggle just writing this. Welp, sorry that there haven't been any updates in a while. Maybe I'll post more Unnamed Extras. Guess I'm just struggling with consistency! If I do finish chapter 4 soon, you all may have to wait a bit before I do publish it. I've learned that posting as soon as you've finished something isn't a good schedule. Maybe once I'm a couple chapters ahead, I'll post it. Sometimes I wonder if I should've finished the Twilight Prophecy first before moving on to The Unnamed Warriors series. Eh, my thoughts are kinda just scattered in this update.

The image above has nothing to do with the story, just a silly comic I made consisting with my other Warriors OCs that don't exist in this book.

Question

(I have uploaded this to The Unnamed Warriors Story in case some readers did not see the announcement on my profile.)

I have already written and finished the next chapter for The Unnamed Warriors Story. The only reason why I haven't posted it yet is because I have not yet finished the chapter art for it. Would you prefer for the chapter to be posted now and the art added in at a later date? Or wait until I finish making the art?